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1 October 1979

WHITE PAPER ON THE PRESENCE  
OF SOVIET TROOPS IN CUBA

1. The Facts About the Brigade

From 1964 until 1979, the United States intelligence community had believed that the Soviet ground combat units which had accompanied the Soviet missile units in 1962 had left Cuba by 1963-4, and that no Soviet combat units were present in Cuba. Beginning in 1976, there was fragmentary evidence suggesting [redacted] Soviet military STAT STAT personnel in Cuba, but this appeared compatible with [redacted] of the Soviet advisor and technical personnel known to be there. In the Spring of this year the National Security Council requested the intelligence community to prepare a current analysis of the Soviet-Cuban military relationship. In the course of this analysis the intelligence community reviewed current intelligence observations as well as data accumulated in earlier years. As a result, in July 1979 the community concluded that there was a body of evidence suggesting the presence in Cuba of a Soviet ground combat unit at least since 1976, but that the evidence was not sufficient to confirm the suggestion. This information was duly reported within the intelligence community and to the senior policy officials of the government. The same information was reported to the appropriate committees of the Congress. It was also discussed in executive session with the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate Armed Services Committee, in connection with the hearings related to the SALT II Treaty. At the same time, the President directed the intelligence community to intensify its efforts to substantiate the possible presence of the unit, and the appropriate Congressional committees were so advised.

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As a result of these intensified intelligence efforts, additional persuasive evidence was obtained. On the basis of this evidence, the intelligence community concluded that a Soviet ground forces brigade was indeed present in Cuba. It judged the number of personnel to be 2600-3000. It found the brigade to be composed of a headquarters, three motorized rifle battalions, one tank battalion, one artillery battalion, and other service support and combat support elements.

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[redacted] the Soviet tank battalion and related combat and service support elements were observed conducting combat exercises at the San Pedro training area which is primarily used by the Cuban Armed Forces.

The 1979 data justified a firm conclusion that the unit observed conducting the exercises was a Soviet unit rather than a Cuban unit. A review of earlier data showed a virtually identical unit conducting similar exercises during the same period of 1978. Although it had not been possible to determine from the 1978 data alone whether the unit conducting the 1978 exercises was a Soviet unit or a Cuban unit, the conclusion drawn from the 1979 data created a reasonable inference that the 1978 exercises had also been conducted by the same Soviet unit.

The tanks and other equipment observed at the San Pedro training area

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[redacted] were no longer present in the area a few days later.

However, what appeared to be a portion of the same equipment was observed at a facility near Santiago de las Vegas, and an additional portion of what appeared to be the same equipment was observed at a garrison area near Lourdes, a town approximately ten miles from Santiago de las Vegas.

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Lourdes is near the site of a large Soviet communications intelligence facility focused on the United States. One of the brigade's elements, a motorized rifle battalion, appears to be stationed near Lourdes adjacent to the Soviet communications collection facility, and it is possible that one function of this unit is to protect the facility. There is no direct intelligence evidence as to the purpose of the other elements of the brigade.

The Soviets have claimed that what we have determined to be a combat brigade is a "training center" engaged in the training of Cuban military personnel. While the possibility of a training function cannot be entirely excluded, the available intelligence does not confirm it. The combat exercises observed in 1979 and 1978 appear to have been separate exercises of the Soviet unit, unassociated with the presence of Cuban units or personnel. Other evidence relating to the existence and activities of the brigade does not indicate significant relationships with Cuban military personnel or units in recent years. Moreover, whether or not the unit does some training, it appears to have a combat capability that is maintained by field combat exercises, and that is not typical of units primarily engaged in the training of other personnel.

The existence of the Soviet brigade had not been publicly acknowledged within Cuba. No reference to the existence, identity or location of the brigade has been found in Cuban publications or broadcasts.

Soviet combined armed forces are not conventionally organized as brigades. However, the Soviet army does use the brigade designation for various units that operate separately from larger conventional ground force

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formations. The structure of the brigade in Cuba is similar to the structure of other identified Soviet combined arms brigades outside Cuba. The battalions which comprise the brigade in Cuba are similar to standard Soviet ground force battalions throughout the Soviet Army.

It is not yet possible to reach a definite conclusion as to how long the brigade or some predecessor element has been in Cuba. As related in the next section of this paper, the Soviet units identified in Cuba during the 1962 missile crisis included a ground combat unit at the same location near Santiago de Las Vegas where elements of the present brigade have been identified. The United States intelligence community believed that the unit present near Santiago de Las Vegas in 1962 was removed from Cuba after the end of the missile crisis, and had no firm indication that any Soviet ground combat unit was present in the Santiago de Las Vegas area or any other part of Cuba. It now appears that at least a small Soviet military presence stayed behind at Santiago when the bulk of Soviet ground forces were withdrawn after the Cuban missile crisis. The brigade now in Cuba apparently evolved out of that residual presence. It is now clear that the unit had achieved essentially its present form at least by 1975-1976.

2. The 1962 Missile Crisis and Soviet-Cuban  
Military Relationships Since That Time

A. The 1962 Missile Crisis

The Cuban missile crisis in the Fall of 1962 was the gravest development in Soviet-American relationships since World War II. The concealed deployment of Soviet missiles in Cuba, capable of delivering nuclear warheads to targets in the United States and its neighbors in the Caribbean region, posed an intolerable threat to our national security and that of the Western hemisphere.

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The current presence of the Soviet ground combat brigade does not directly threaten the United States as did the missiles of 1962. Nevertheless, the 1962 crisis and its aftermath must be understood to appraise the significance of the brigade's presence in 1979.

In the Summer of 1962 we began observing a substantial movement of Soviet personnel and equipment into Cuba. There were numerous rumors that the Soviets were planning to install offensive weapons in Cuba capable of reaching United States targets. But intensive surveillance did not confirm these rumors until a U-2 flight on October 14. That flight clearly identified the preparation of a Soviet medium-range missile base in the San Cristobal area. Additional surveillance confirmed preparations for the deployment of three major Soviet offensive weapons systems in Cuba:

6 MRBM (medium range ballistic missile) sites

3 IRBM (intermediate range ballistic missile) sites

2 squadrons of IL-28 nuclear capable bombers.

On October 22, President Kennedy announced these facts to the American public. He instituted a "quarantine" of Cuba backed by a naval blockade, intensified our surveillance of the build-up, reinforced our naval base at Guantanamo, and appealed to the Soviet Union to withdraw these offensive weapons immediately from Cuba. As the result of negotiations during the ensuing month, the Soviet Union agreed to withdraw the offensive weapons, and the quarantine was lifted on November 20. As part of these arrangements, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed that United Nations observers could conduct on-site inspections of the removal of the offensive weapons systems from Cuba, that the further introduction of such weapons systems would not occur, and that the United States would give assurances against an invasion of Cuba.

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The Soviet Union proceeded promptly to remove the offensive weapons systems. President Castro subsequently declined to permit the on-site inspections by United Nations observers. The United States verified this removal by intensive aerial and naval surveillance.

Before the 1962 crisis was resolved, our surveillance noted the existence of Soviet ground combat units in Cuba deployed at four major and several smaller locations. One of the four major locations was near Santiago de las Vegas, at the same place where we have now identified major elements of the current brigade.

In the course of the 1962 negotiations, the United States called the existence of these units to the attention of the Soviet Union. In a letter from Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy dated November 20, 1962, Chairman Khrushchev stated that the Soviets would "ship out of Cuba those groups of our military personnel which although (they) were not directly involved in servicing the rocket weapons now removed still had something to do with guarding those installations." At his news conference on November 20 announcing the lifting of the quarantine, President Kennedy stated on the basis of this letter:

"The importance of our continued vigilance is underlined by our identification in recent days of a number of Soviet ground combat units in Cuba, although we are informed that these and other Soviet units were associated with the protection of offensive weapons systems and will also be withdrawn in due course."

In a subsequent conversation of November 29, 1962 between President Kennedy and Soviet First Deputy Chairman Mikoyan, President Kennedy said

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that the withdrawal agreement covered missiles, bombers, and in due course, other units destined to service or guard the strategic offensive weapons. He also said there was of course other military material present in Cuba about which he was not speaking. Mr. Mikoyan said that the correspondence between the two Heads of State is clear on that point.

During the 1962 negotiations the Soviet Union did not specifically identify the ground combat unit observed at Santiago de las Vegas (or any other specific unit) as one of the units which were present to guard the missile bases and were to be removed in due course. One of the four major units identified in 1962 was located at Holguin, some distance from the missile bases, but the other three, (Santiago de las Vegas, Remedios, and Artemisa), were located near Soviet missile bases.

It now appears that unlike the other three garrisons for Soviet combat units in Cuba in 1962, the one at Santiago was probably not turned over to Cuban control, as was estimated until recently, although the Soviet presence there was sharply reduced by 1964. An intensive retrospective analysis of photographs and other data obtained since 1964 shows that the facility at Santiago de las Vegas subsequently underwent periodic improvement and expansion, and the presence of combat equipment has been periodically noted.

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